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At the same time, the national health profile has steadily deteriorated. Dysentery, typhoid fever and tuberculosis have become endemic. More than 46 per cent of the Vietnamese die within the first 15 years of life.

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How many of them could have described, however briefly, the regime for whose perpetuation they gave their final sacrifice?

How many have been spiritually wounded as accomplices, hardened, perhaps for the rest of their lives, to human suffering and immunized against the finer human qualities of sympathy and compassion?

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We therefore call again upon our countrymen and government:

To stop the air attacks on both North and South Vietnam, at once, unilaterally, not simply as a political move in the direction of negotiations, but because those attacks are an affront to human decency and unworthy of a great people;

To express a clear intention to withdraw all U.S. military forces from Vietnam, consistent with the 1954 Geneva Agreements, to take effect immediately on conclusion of satisfactory arrangements to assure the Vietnamese people a free choice of government;

To state unequivocally U.S. readiness to negotiate an end to the war on the basis of the 1954 Agreements, with the National Liberation Front as one of the principals in the negotiations.

We appeal to all concerned parties to pledge themselves to more representative and responsible government in South Vietnam.

We ask our fellow Americans to begin the work of repentance and healing in Vietnam. We have paid for the maiming. We cannot excuse ourselves from the consequences.

We ask more fundamentally for a national examination of conscience. We Americans boast of a religious heritage; many speak with scorn of the "Godless." Yet no act of brutality initiated by American or allied forces, seems to be a violation of the ethical values Americans profess; at the same time, enemy atrocities of far lesser magnitude are decryd with vigor.

Every life on this planet is in some sense subject to the decision made by the world's wealthiest, most powerful people.

In fact, as never before in man's history, Americans are now confronted with the fundamental choice: life, or death.

It is late, but not too late, to choose life.

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#### VISIT TO SAIGON

(By Alfred Hassler, executive secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the International Committee of Conscience on Vietnam)

My visit consisted of two week-long stays in Saigon, separated by four days in Hong Kong, an arrangement that made it unnecessary to apply for a visa. The first week coincided with the Vietnamese New Year (Tet) and the truce arranged for that period. During this time I stayed one night at the Hotel Caravelle and the rest of the week at the Hotel Majestic, both heavily patronized by Americans and widely reputed to be under the close surveillance of the CIA, including "bugged" rooms, etc. During the second week I had a room in a rooming house operated by a Buddhist family in another section of the city, somewhat less convenient but considerably more secure.

Because I came armed with warm letters of introduction from Thich Nhat Hanh, I was accepted fully into circles of people in Saigon who, by their own admission, have not felt able to talk frankly and honestly with any American—or indeed any Westerner—for the

past two years. I cannot say of personal knowledge whether their suspicions about the near-total penetration by the CIA of all Western groups in Vietnam, official and unofficial, are warranted, but I must assume that on these matters they, and some of the representatives of such Western groups who tend to confirm their suspicions, are better informed than I.

This is one of the first impressions one gets in Saigon today: the aura of suspicion that permeates the society, and the almost total lack of communication between any of the Americans there and those segments of Vietnamese society that are seriously critical both of the war and of the present South Vietnamese government. Since this is a very large proportion of the population, the consequence is a steadily deepening chasm between the South Vietnamese and the Americans who are ostensibly there to assist them.

In Saigon proper the curfew runs from midnight to 4 a.m., but on the edges of the city the householders are required to stay indoors after dark. The authorities "cannot tell them from the Viet Cong" is the explanation, and of course it is true, since many of them are the Viet Cong or its sympathizers. The sudden terroristic attack must be prevented, since there is almost no hope of catching the perpetrator once it has occurred no one will have seen him, or would be able to identify him if they had!

The result of all this is an atmosphere more reminiscent of a police state than a democracy, even a democracy at war. Whether or not the CIA is actually as ubiquitous as people believe it to be, the fact is that the Vietnamese see CIA agents everywhere, and all relationships are distorted and fouled by suspicion.

I spent all of my time in Saigon and Cholon, the Chinese section of the city. I had hoped to get out at least to some of the villages in which the School of Youth for Social Service volunteers work, but my hosts considered it to be too dangerous for me to do so and flatly refused to take me. I neither sought nor had interviews with any officials of either the South Vietnamese or the American governments, or with members of the press. I did visit some of the voluntary agencies whose headquarters are in Saigon, including the Vietnamese Christian Service operated jointly by the Mennonites, Church World Service and Lutheran World Service; the American Friends Service Committee, the International Committee of the Red Cross, etc. Most of my time, however, was spent with Vietnamese individuals and groups to whom Nhat Hanh's letters had given me access. These included some of the top officials of the Unified Buddhist Church, members of the Catholic peace movement, and students and professors from several of the five universities of South Vietnam.

The most important single observation to make, I think, was the extent to which I found Thich Nhat Hanh's analysis of the situation confirmed: namely, that there is the potential for a substantial middle grouping of well-informed and sophisticated people who are committed to peace but who also wish to have a stance from which to deal on even terms with the National Liberation Front and the North Vietnamese.

The second half of this observation, however, is more depressing: it is that this middle group is being badly eroded by a despair of moderating the American position and by a growing conviction that the United States does not in fact want either peace or negotiations. Whist leaders, students, and intellectuals, and Catholics alike grow increasingly cynical about U.S. objectives, and the word "colonialist" is common in their discussions. And the attribution of colonialist, or neo-colonialist, goals to America simply serves to underline and confirm these claims of the National Liberation Front. This is

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